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Dating and Duality: Plautus' *Amphitruo* in the Historical Context

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Dating and Duality: Plautus' *Amphitruo* in the Historical Context

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Abstract

Dating and Duality: Plautus' *Amphitruo* in the Historical Context

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Within the extant corpus of Plautus, *Amphitruo* is particularly unusual, and not comfortably situated within an established genre. Nestled in the liminal space between non-Roman and Roman, comedy and tragedy, oral and written, and religious and socio-political commentary, the complexity of *Amphitruo* falls well beyond the boundaries of the standard Plautine comedic plot. Although close intertextual readings of the *Amphitruo* have been essential for interpretation, situating it within its historical context would provide an additional resource for a richer understanding of it. Through evaluation of the astrological ekphrasis in the text, it appears that the performance of the *Amphitruo* can be dated to the dedication of the Magna Mater cult at the *ludi Megalenses* in 191 BCE. Keeping this in mind, we can better evaluate the dualities and socio-political references situated within the text as a commentary on the substantial religious and political changes that followed the end of the Second Punic War and adoption of a foreign cult as the Roman mother goddess.

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Section I. Introduction

The comedic cleverness of Plautus is widely recognized among modern scholars, a perception that has improved considerably since Mommsen declared Roman that comedy, “with its offensive and unnatural magnanimity... [to be] one continuous lesson of Romano-Hellenic demoralization.”¹ Plautus’ perfectly embraced the festive atmosphere of the Roman *ludi* while providing the audience with discreet commentary on a complex and ever evolving society. Despite being the most elaborate of the Plautine corpus *Amphitruo* is rarely considered for interpretation, usually summarized for comparison’s sake in the introduction pages of the more accessible plays. Whether out of caution or frustration many scholars have considered this play “problematic and exceptional” determining that it is “safer to base preliminary conclusions concerning the tone of Roman comedy on more representative plays.”² The fundamental flaw with this knee-jerk reaction is that since there is no indication that *Amphitruo* is incorrectly attributed to Plautus, there should be no apparent reason to exclude it from interpretations within the Plautine corpus. The significant shift in style between *Amphitruo* and Plautus’ other comedies could be a good indication that external cultural changes are being expressed through a new type of performative style that was previously less compelling.

The Western world is heavily indebted to the literature from the Classical world. One need only skim through the Latin-inspired spells of Harry Potter or spot George

¹Mommsen (1862) 434-450

² Marshall (2009) 188-89

Clooney as he portrays πολύτροπος Ὀδυσσεύς through the depression-era convict Ulysses Everett McGill to see how this literature has continued to influence artistic expression into the modern era. Although Greek literature is well attested from the sixth century on, its Roman counterpart did not begin to develop until the mid-third century — a process for which we have remarkably little evidence. Some twenty extant plays attributed to the early comedian Plautus are the earliest complete attestations for what is considered Latin literature. This pivotal position has stimulated plenty of scholarship concerning the influence of Greek literature on the early development of Rome and the subsequent emergence of a distinctive Latin style.

Within the extant corpus of Plautus, *Amphitruo* is particularly unusual, and not comfortably situated within an established genre. Nestled in the liminal space between non-Roman and Roman, comedy and tragedy, oral and written, and religious and socio-political commentary, the complexity of *Amphitruo* falls well beyond the boundaries of the standard Plautine comedic plot. A unique and puzzling neologistic feature is the comedy's self-professed genre of "tragicomedy," for which we have no other ancient comparison. Beyond this characteristic, the plot of *Amphitruo* is heavily dependent on the theme of duality and gemination, which works in compliment with the hybrid genre to highlight the tragic and comedic aspects in each scene.

The rapid cohesion of the Italian cultural groups working together to stave off advancing armies from abroad set in motion an unprecedented series of socio-political developments that radically altered the course of Rome. From the third to second

centuries, Roman literature rapidly developed from being a “Roman translation project” to a complex form of artistic expression that is predicated upon, but distinct from the earlier Greek literature.³ Because Plautus appears to be transitional between his translation-based predecessors (Livius Andronius and Naevius) and distinctively Roman successors beginning with Terence, the fact that so much of his corpus remains is fortuitous. His works are vital for our ability to discover the agents that were acting as a driving force behind the development of Latin literature. For this exercise, it is necessary to evaluate the literary sources within the context of their historical and physical contexts. By doing this, it will be easier to determine which external and internal forces were driving changes in the Roman social classes, what motivated these changes, and how the institution of religious and secular law codes further affected the citizens. Rome did not exist in a vacuum, particularly at the turn of the second century, and each conscious decision made by the Roman aristocracy had profound effects on the developing Roman state whether or not it was intentional.

While there has been considerable progress in the evaluation of the *Amphitruo* in recent years, early criticism from influential literary scholars has left the comedy severely underestimated in regards to its influence and development of this transitional culture. If the *Amphitruo* represents a portion of this phase, its eccentricity could tell us a considerable amount about how profoundly social pressures affected the development of literature — particularly if it is possible to tease out details surrounding the purpose and

³ Feeney (2016) Chapter 2

production of the play. In light of this potential, I intend to build upon the most recent interpretations of unique features in the *Amphitruo*, particularly examining the social implications of these innovations, and consider in what ways this might affect how we situate this comedy within the Plautine corpus and what bearing this endeavor might have on our perception of social influence on literature.

Section II: Dating *Amphitruo*

Although close intertextual readings of the *Amphitruo* have been essential for interpretation, situating it within its historical context would provide an additional resource for a richer understanding of it. The nature of comedy is to act as a social commentary, using psychological mechanisms like comic catharsis and self-referential metadrama in order make the spectators laugh.⁴ Although Livy is one of our best sources for the historical period involving Plautus he makes no mention of specific plays in association with the festivals he documents.⁵ Dates for Plautus' plays are only given by the didascallic records: *Pseudolus* in 191 and *Stichus* in 200; although some scholars have considered 194 for *Trinummus*.⁶ But what, if anything, is there to gain by determining the performance date for *Amphitruo*? Certainly the implications would greatly impact our understanding of the mechanisms driving the development of Latin literature and Roman history in the third and second centuries. With Plautus as our only surviving source of comedy during the formative years of Roman culture, it is vital to have as much information about the chronological background as possible in order to determine how various events or stressors drove particular changes in culture. Some aspects of society

⁴ Hunter (1985) x-xi

⁵ Leigh (2004) 2-3

⁶ Chrsitenson (2000) 2; Frank, T (1932) 155-56; Frank suggests that 187 should also be considered based on Scipionic themes in the play.

are inextricably bound to one another, and rising tension in one would become manifest in another.⁷

The decades surrounding the turn of the second century triggered profound social changes for Rome as she diverged from the cultural dependence on Greece. It was a time in which ever increasing warfare and wealth accumulation by a handful of elites prompted massive restructuring of government and religion in order to minimize corruption, which ultimately appeared in contemporary literature through commentary or jest. A performance of *Amphitruo* in 207 (prior to the end of the Second Punic War) would be interpreted much differently than if it were dated to 194 (following Rome's success and eventual campaigns in the East). Although the theme of warfare permeates through all of Plautus' works he never makes specific references to battles, generals or locations, and with dozens of wars happening in rapid succession, dating *Amphitruo* through Amphitryon's status as a soldier is not possible.

With this in mind, many historians either avoid confronting the date of *Amphitruo* and often it is not necessary for interpretation. In attempting to understand in what ways events shaped Roman society and Latin literature however, it would be useful to situate it based on the historical narrative as evidenced in the play. Gordon Williams declared that "the attempt to date precisely Plautus' plays by historical allusions is a 'ridiculous occupation', and why W. Geoffrey Arnott's recent survey of Menander, Plautus, and

⁷ Cicero, On His House 41 "si et sacrorum iure pontifices et auspiorum religione augures totum evertunt tribunatum tuum, quid quaeris amplius? an etiam apertius aliquod ius populi atque legum?"

Terence says comparatively little about Plautine chronology.”⁸ Scholars have variously dated *Amphitruo* in the last two centuries, ranging from 207 to 186 — which is essentially the entire *floruit* of Plautus, however Christenson’s interpretation seems to be sensible, in which he narrows the scope from 190-185.⁹ The later dating is also consistent with Livy’s chronology regarding the establishment of the *tresviri*, which were established in 199 and are referenced in *Amphitruo*.¹⁰

Dating *Amphitruo* would have profitable impacts on its interpretation, but only if the date is a correct one, therefore I have been cautious not to make speculations unless necessary, in which case I will be clear about any assumptions taken. When dating Plautus, the adoption of Harvey’s strict methodology will produce the least amount of interpretation bias:

We should ask two questions: (1) Does the allusion reflect or refer to a specifically Roman event, institution, person or circumstance? If so, we then avoid the charge that a presumed Greek original may have contained a similar line of description. (2) If we determine that the allusion is to Roman matters, is the allusion to some general aspect of Roman affairs or to some specific person,

⁸ Williams (1956) 446

⁹ Harvey (1986) 301-302; Christenson (2000) 3-4; based on chronologies established by Duckworth and Sedgwick.

¹⁰ Plaut *Amph* 155 “quid faciam nunc si tresviri me in carcerem compegerint?”

place, and event? Greater progress and more convincing work may well consist of efforts at explicating the general Roman atmosphere.¹¹

Although there are significant grounds for accepting Christenson's date range of 190-185, it would be preferable to err on the side of caution at the outset assuming the broadest dates given and from there, proceed to narrow the possible timeframe.; therefore assuming Livy's appointment of the *tresviri* under the consulship of L. Cornelius Lentulus in 199, it appears to be the most reliable *terminus post quem*.¹² Given Plautus' date of death as 184, a range of 199-185 is the safest range of dates to definitively date the *Amphitruo*. While the range is broad, it should be possible to further narrow the window using context from later historians and from the play itself.

Large stage performances of tragedy and comedy were relegated to festival days of the various *ludi Romani*, which further narrows the time of year in which *Amphitruo* could have been performed (although with as many as 135 festival days, it only adds a slight advantage).¹³ It is Mercury's reference to the office of aediles in line 73 that proves to be particularly helpful, since political offices tend to be preserved through commentary in historical sources like Livy and Cicero. Aediles served various functions for the state, with care of temples and the organization of public games being among them. Curule

¹¹ Harvey (1986) 303

¹² Livy 32.2

¹³ Bunson (1995) 246

aediles were representative of the patrician class, while the Plebian aediles represented the plebians — those who, following the heated debate following the establishment of the *Lex Licinia Sextia*, were divided to administer different observances of yearly *ludi*.¹⁴ Sticking with Mercury's prologue, line 64 includes a reference the *pignoris capio*, which is one of the pledges exercised by the aediles, but more specifically the curule aediles who were in charge of overseeing the *ludi Romani* in September and the *Megalensia* in April.¹⁵

According to Livy, the *ludi Romani* were established under Tarquinius Priscus in celebration of Jupiter, which were initially celebrated only on solemn occasions.¹⁶ Eventually, the games were celebrated annually, and were later extended as a result of the Plebian revolt arbitration in 494.¹⁷ The *Megalensia* on the other hand, were the festivals associated with the Magna Mater (alternatively called Cybele), who happened to be the most recent appropriation of cult through the Roman practice of *evocatio*. The natural inclination regarding a play about Jupiter is to assume that the *ludi Romani* are the most obvious fit for the production of *Amphitruo*. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately) this is one instance in which the historical record seems to negate this interpretation. Although the athletic contests of *ludi Romani* were celebrated annually, the associated

¹⁴ Livy 6.42-7.12

¹⁵ de Melo (2011) 19n; Christenson (2000) 153n

¹⁶ Livy 1.35

¹⁷ Mackay (2004) 25-26

theatrical games (*ludi scaenici*) only appear in conjunction with the games of 201 and 179.¹⁸ Because there is no explicit mention of exclusion by Livy however, an argument dismissing the *ludi Romani ex silentio* would be an oversight, and I agree with Taylor's conclusion that this is more likely indicative of *instauratio* further extending the games in each instance.¹⁹ There is no reason to suggest that within the twenty year period of *ludi* expansion that only two would have included dramatic performances.

While there is no specific reference to the *ludi* in *Amphitruo* to distinguish between the games, a closer inspection of the text yields valuable information, although slightly convoluted, therefore it is necessary to quote at some length. In scene one Mercury interacts with his duplicate Sosia for the first time. Their contact begins with Sosia taking note of the particularly long night — the lengthening of which Mercury has already attributed to Jupiter extending his tryst with Alcmene. In this exchange Sosia is so confused by the night that he can only attribute it to a drunken Night and hungover Sun!

¹⁸ Taylor (1937) 242

¹⁹ Taylor 242-245

SOS: Certe edepol, si quicquamst aliud quod credam aut certo sciam,
credo ego hac noctu **Nocturnum** obdormivisse ebrium.
nam neque se **Septentriones** quoquam in caelo commovent,
neque se **Luna** quoquam mutat atque uti exorta est semel,
nec **Iugulae** neque **Vesperugo** neque **Vergiliae** occidunt.
ita statim stant signa, neque nox quoquam concedit die.

MERC: Perge, Nox, ut occepisti, gere patri morem meo:
optumo optume optumam operam das, datam pulchre locas.

SOS: Neque ego hac nocte longiorem me vidisse censeo,
nisi item unam, verberatus quam pependi perpetem;
eam quoque edepol etiam multo haec vicit longitudine.
credo edepol equidem dormire **Solem**, atque adpotum probe;
mira sunt nisi invitavit sese in cena plusculum.

SOS: If there's anything I believe or know for sure, I certainly
do know that this night Nocturnus has fallen asleep
drunk: the Great Bear isn't moving anywhere in the sky,
the Moon isn't going to any place different from where it
was when it first rose, and Orion, the Evening Star, and
the Pleiades aren't setting either. The constellations are
standing still and there's no sign anywhere that night is

giving way to day.

MERC: (aside) Continue, Night, as you've begun. Oblige my father.

You're doing an excellent job for an excellent god in
an excellent way, you're investing your effort beautifully.

SOS: I don't think I've seen a longer night than this, except the
one when I got beaten and was left hanging for as long as
it lasted. But lengthwise this one has outdone even that
one by far. I think Sol is asleep, after some heavy drinking
a bit much at dinner.²⁰

This particularly alliterative scene acts as a reminder to the audience that Jupiter is just behind the *scenae* enjoying a lustful night with Alcmena. Although Christenson argues that this vividly described scene has no intention other than emphasizing the length of the night, however I think there is more to be said about this section.²¹ At the very least, it seems that the description of complete stillness elicits an ominous reaction foreshadowing the unfortunate beating Sosia will soon receive at the hands of Mercury. I would like to take the interpretation further²² and suggest that Plautus is not simply inserting a stock description of the sky, but rather he is being ekphrastic. I argue that this

²⁰ Plaut Amph 271-283

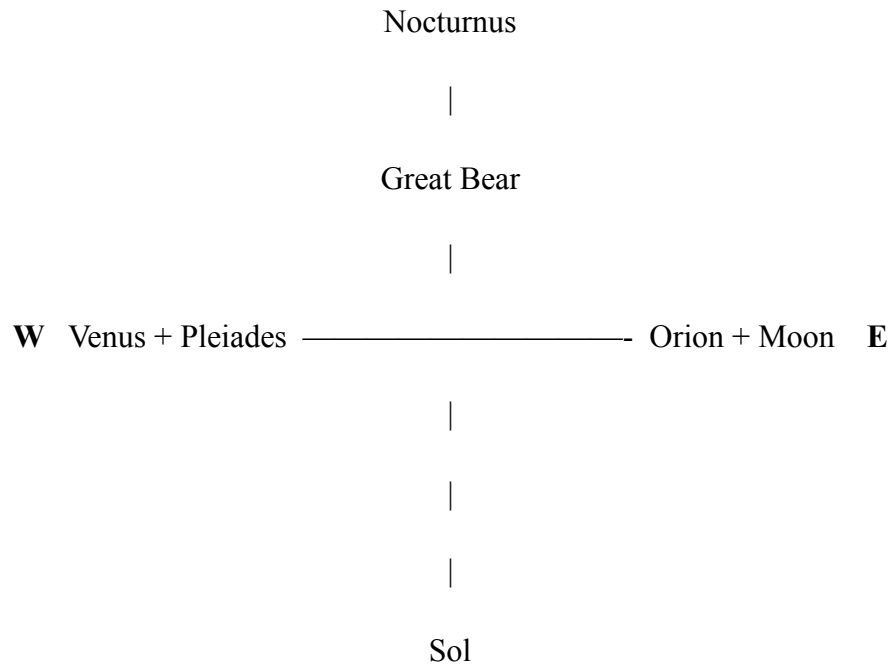
²¹ Christenson (2000) 196

²² see Christenson 196 n272 "Nocturnum: the reference has not been convincingly explained."

scene is indeed descriptive of the night sky at the time of the play, and furthermore, it is possible from this to determine the month as since the moon, stars, and planets move in regular and predictable paths.

In the description, Sosia is confused because the moon (*Luna*) has not moved from the location it had risen (East) and the Evening Star had not set (West). Vesper is the (non-static) planet Venus which, fortunately, the Romans distinguished whenever it was located in the east (*Lucifer*) rather than the west (*Vesper*). Coupled with Venus are the Pleiades (*Vergiliae*), which should also be setting (W), and in the same line Orion (E), which is not given an absolute location, but the proximity of Iugulae-Luna and the nature of duality within the *Amphitruo* suggests they are acting as a pair. The Great Bear constellation (*Septentriones*) is circumpolar and therefore overhead in the night sky in the northern hemisphere, which leaves *Nocturnum* in the highest position. In Etruscan and Italic mythological inscriptions, Nocturnus (Saturn) is identified as the night zenith and the axial polar opposite of the Sun disc.²³

²³ Torelli (1995) 108-110



The positioning of the celestial beings in the sky is likewise duplicated in the text, with Nocturnus and Sol above and below the paired celestial figures (see above in bold). This further supports the assertion that this ekphrasis was intended to evoke a specific time and not simply a stock image.

Taking these locations into consideration, it is may also be possible to determine the season by the setting of the Pleiades, which can be seen in the northern hemisphere during the winter and set below the horizon in mid-April.²⁴

²⁴ Kelley (2005) 23

JUP prius tua opinione hic adero: bonum animum habe.

nunc te, nox, quae me mansisti, mitto uti cedas die,

ut mortalis inlucescat luce clara et candida.

atque quanto, nox, fuisti longior hac proxuma,

tanto brevior dies ut fiat faciam, ut aequae disparet.

sed dies e nocte accedat. ibo et Mercurium sequar ²⁵

JUP Nighty, you've waited for me, but now I let you give way to

Day, so that he may shine upon the mortals with clear and

bright light. And, Night, as much as you were longer than

the last, so much shorter shall I let Day become so as to

compensate. Go, let Day issue forth from Night. I'll go

and follow Mercury.

This is further substantiated as Jupiter concludes his night with Alcemene he allows the night to depart, not as Nocturnus this but as *nox*, and the day (*dies*) to return but not as Sol.²⁶ When the day rises, all the other celestial beings will disappear. Jupiter's command to *nox* is also imbued with meaning, since upon allowing night to extend

²⁵ Plautus Amph 546-550

²⁶ Nocturnus is an equivalent for Saturn, which since he was castrated by Jupiter is no longer potent and therefore weakens to lowercase in his presence. Sol was never defeated by Jupiter, however it seems to be underscoring the power of Jupiter. Orion (for chasing the Pleiades), the Pleiades, and Ursa Major (Great Bear) were all made constellations by Jupiter.

longer he had to shorten the day in order to make them portion them out equally (*aeque disparet*). This suggests that had he not interfered, there would already have been a *dies-aeque-nox*, or the Vernal Equinox of Spring.

Using literary ekphrasis to expose the timeframe of worship has parallels in Greek sources as well. Euripides' *Erechtheus* explores the birth of the Hyades, giving vivid descriptions of the night sky in order to emphasize the timing of the cult of Kallyntēria.²⁷ The connections between the cult, rites, and sacred spaces on the Athenian Acropolis are all explored by Euripides in attempt to further connect the landscape with the celestial aspects of the cult.²⁸

Incorporating this information it is fairly safe to suggest that, excepting incredible sarcasm on the part of Plautus, *Amphitruo* was likely performed in Spring at the *ludi Megalenses*. Within Plautus' *floruit* there are three celebrations of this cult: in 204 when the *Magna Mater* cult was received in Rome, in 194 where Plautus performed *Pseudolus*, and at the dedication of her temple on the Palatine in 191.²⁹ Since 204 is certainly too early for the *Amphitruo*'s performance and 194 is contested by some historians, the most reasonable year for the performance for such a unique play would be at a temple dedication for the new *Magna Mater*, who was already drawing criticism after only ten

²⁷ Boutsikas (2012) 234-235

²⁸ Bousikas (2012) 238-39

²⁹ Boyle (2006) 15-16

years for the unintended consequence of welcoming her consort Attis, whose priests were eunuchs.³⁰

³⁰ Beard, et al (1998) 98

Section III. Case Study: *Amphitruo et Ludi*

By the end of the third century Rome had become increasingly involved in military struggle. The smaller campaigns to consolidate the Italian mainland in the fourth and third centuries spiraled out of control once they reached the Carthaginian colonies of Sicily. While the Second Punic War was a direct response to Carthaginian hostility, the Macedonian Wars with Greece were a hyper-reaction to Philip V's attempted alliance with Hannibal during the war. The Romans ultimately ended the Second Punic War victorious, however Greece would no longer have the luxury of a cooperative relationship with Italy leading to a perceptible hardening of Roman society on Greek influence.³¹ As plebian aristocratic wealth rapidly accumulated Roman generals became more aggressive and a focus on the active conquest of the east consumed all aspects of Roman society from 202 to 146. This short period was rife with successive battles in the east while an increasingly evident gap in wealth created an underlying current of social unrest. Military service during the Second Punic War left small farms failing, leaving military farmers disenfranchised and bankrupt even with the acquisition of spoils during war.³² With an influx of foreign captives from the eastern conquests, brutal generals demanding triumph, and a disenfranchised farmer soldiery an out of control nationalism was rising and Roman lawmakers reacted swiftly. Sumptuary laws banning ostentatious display of

³¹ MacKay (2004)

³² Rosenstein (2004) 44-46

wealth, systematic banning of foreign cults, and imposition of Latin as the primary language of law and economy began to force a collective identity among those living in Italy that was distinct from any of Rome's predecessors, whether Italian or foreign.³³

If *Amphitruo* was produced in 191, some intriguing conclusions can be drawn regarding the uniqueness, purpose, and performance of this strange tragicomedy.³⁴ There are a plethora of opportunities for comedies to be performed at the turn of the second century in Rome through festivals and triumphs. Beyond that, Plautus is writing within a very narrow timeframe of Roman history and one that happens to have two incredible faults: social discord provoked by continuous war and the lack of a contemporary historian. Nowhere in Plautus is there an unambiguous reference to a contemporary event, which is hardly surprising given the nature of patrician reaction to Naevius, an incident for which Plautus would certainly have been aware.³⁵ The imprisonment and exile of Naevius for insults involving the Metelli and Scipios would have likely created some apprehension among contemporary playwrights who were making direct assertions concerning the corruption, political offices, and unending warfare.

The cult of the Magna Mater was brought to Rome from Phrygia in 204 following an appeal to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi by the state in 205. The end of the third

³³ Adams (2004) 113-115

³⁴ Christenson (2000) 2-3

³⁵ Boyle (2006) 53-55 "The reference to the imprisoned 'foreign poet' (*poeta barbarus*) by Plautus at *Miles Gloriosus* 211-12 shows that poets were imprisoned for unbridled speech at this time and commentators have not been slow to identify Plautus' *poeta barbarus* with Naevius"

century found Rome in a second war with Carthage and just ending a war with Macedonia. A temple to the Magna Mater took over ten years to complete and was dedicated in 191 on the Palatine Hill just next to the ancestral hut of Romulus. This conspicuous placement and prominent festival (*ludi Megalenses*) appears to have been a random occurrence, however the Roman tradition of *evocatio* along with the continual expansion of the army into the East suggests that this is characteristic of Rome in the second half of the third century.³⁶ Likewise, 204 was not Rome's first interaction with the cult of the Magna Mater, who was already a sacred Etruscan deity Cybele and worshipped around Sicily as Demeter.³⁷ In order to retrieve the goddess from Phrygia, a *vir optimus* (P. Scipio Nasica), and *castissima matronum* (Claudia Quinta) was selected and sent with a large delegation of the most prominent Roman gens traveled to Iean Pergamon in order to make diplomatic contact with Pergamon and return the new mother goddess of the city.³⁸ External concerns of warfare were not the only reason to look to the East for founding a mother goddess. The Second Punic War led to an increased number of triumphant and wealthy generals who took advantage of this power in order to build fund private temples and games.³⁹ This first appears problematic near the end of the Second Punic War as the character of men and the gods changed, and women failed to

³⁶ Roller (1999) 280-282

³⁷ Roller (1999) 281

³⁸ Roller (1999) 283-285

³⁹ Beard , et al. (1996) 88ff

make the proper sacrifices and were driven into the city.⁴⁰ Increasing hostilities leading up to 186 suggests that Livy was referring to the cult of Bacchus as a disruption to the city, and the sudden adoption of the Magna Mater - a goddess who, while in Greece, had the ability to heal Dionysus (Bacchus) when Hera struck him with madness.⁴¹ It is hardly surprising then that if the Bacchic cult was problematic, a new state-sponsored cult likewise known for furious religious festivals would assist in driving out unwanted immoral behavior.

A connection between the *Amphitruo* and Bacchus/Dionysus is consistent with most interpretations of the comedy.⁴² Subversive frivolity, frenzy, madness, and accusations of drunkenness show obvious Bacchic themes, however when considering that this play was likely performed at the *ludi Megalenses* it appears that there are references to the conflict that was occurring regarding the cult of Bacchus in Rome. If the Magna Mater was put in place to reassert state control and more conservative values, the *Amphitruo* emphasized this between the scenes in which the characters suffer from frenzy and mania. While missing her soldier husband, Alcmena explains how he is a *vir optimus*:

⁴⁰ Livy 25.1-2

⁴¹ Beard, et. al (1999) 157

⁴² Beard, et. al (1999) 93; “It has always been clear from Plautus’ explicit references that the Bacchic cult itself was established years before 186..”

virtus praemium est optimum;
virtus omnibus rebus anteit profecto:
libertas, salus, vita, res et parentes,
patria et prognati
tuantur, eruantur:
uirtus omnia in sese habet, omnia assunt
bona quem penest uirtus

Courage is the best reward
courage does indeed outdo everything:
freedom, safety, life, possessions and parents,
home and relatives are protected and preserved⁴³

Likewise, she identifies the qualities of a *pudica femina*:

non ego illam mi dotem duco esse quae dos dicitur
sed pudicitiam et pudorem et sedatum cupidinem,
deum metum, parentum amorem et cognatum concordiam
tibi morigera atque ut munifica sim bonis, prosim probis

⁴³ Plaut Amph 648-54

I don't consider that to be my dowry which is called
a dowry, but chastity, modesty, self-control, fear of the gods
love for my parents, friendship with relatives, obedience to
you, generosity to the good, and help for the honorable.

In this case, the comedy does not only assert the dominance for the new cult, but sets a moral framework for a virtuous Roman amidst dangerous frenzy that threatens to upset a familial household. Likewise, the renowned status of Scipio Nasica and Claudia would undoubtedly have resonated with the description of virtue.⁴⁴

Beyond the moralistic assertions of the play, there appear to be other lines alluding to the adoption of the mother cult, the first of which has been problematic for interpretation can be clarified in this context. As Sosia and Mercury are arguing over which of them is the 'real' Sosia, it is said that they have traveled from Port Persicus (*ex portu Persico*)⁴⁵. While there is no such port name around Thebes or the Euboean coast, it could be that this is actually a reference to the arrival of the Magna Mater.

An intriguing interpretation appears at the end of the play after Amphitryon discovers he is the father of twin boys, one who is the son of Jupiter (allusion to Scipio Africanus?) and will give him utmost glory. Just before Jupiter enters for his final scene, Amphitryon asserts that he wants to consult the soothsayer Tiresias (*ego Teresiam*

⁴⁴ Roller (1999) 279-281

⁴⁵ Plaut Amph 405

coniectorem aduocabo et consulam quid faciundum censeat).⁴⁶ In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Tiresias is not only the blind seer, but he intends to participate in the rights of Dionysus and encourages Pentheus and to do the same.

δύο γάρ, ὦ νεανία,
τὰ πρῶτ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισι: Δημήτηρ θεά--
γῆ δ' ἐστίν, ὄνομα δ' ὁπότερον βούλη κάλει:
αὕτη μὲν ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφει βροτούς:
ὅς δ' ἦλθ' ἔπειτ', ἀντίπαλον ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος
βότρυος ὑγρὸν πῶμ' ἤρρε κείσηνέγκατο
θνητοῖς, ὃ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπώρους βροτούς
λύπης, ὅταν πλησθῶσιν ἀμπέλου ροῆς,
ὕπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν
δίδωσιν, οὐδ' ἔστ' ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων.
οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,
ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.

⁴⁶ Plaut *Amph* 1130

For two things, young man, are first among men:
the goddess Demeter—she is the earth, but call her
whatever name you desire; she nourishes
mortals with dry food; but he who came afterwards,
the offspring of Semele, discovered a match to it,
the liquid drink of the grape, and introduced it to mortals.
It releases wretched mortals from grief, whenever
they are filled with the stream of the vine, and gives them sleep,
a means of forgetting their daily troubles,
nor is there another cure for hardships.
He who is a god is poured out in offerings to the gods,
so that by his means men may have good things.⁴⁷

In this passage, Tiresias urges Pentheus not to be grieved by the strangeness of the new god, but to worship him in the same way that he would respect Demeter (Cybele). This is inverted in Plautus, as the new deity would likewise be a foreigner that the Roman state would encourage acceptance, as she was brought during a time of drought and extreme anxiety in order to nourish and provide for Rome in her time of need.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Eurip Bacch 275-285

⁴⁸ Beard, et al (1999) 81-85

The connections between Dionysus in Euripides and the Bacchus cult in Rome represented in the *Amphitruo* are clear.⁴⁹ It is not explicit though Plautus that the Magna Mater would be associated with Bacchus, although Greek tragedy and historical sources make it otherwise obvious.⁵⁰ Without contextualizing the *Amphitruo* within the setting of the *ludi Megalensia*, it is possible that despite the clear connection these scenes of mania would have been to the audience, they would be lost on the modern reader.

⁴⁹ Plaut Amph 703 “Bacchae bacchanit si uelis aduorsarier!”; Eurip Bacch 85-87 “ἴτε βάκχαι, ἴτε βάκχαι, Βρόμιον παῖδα θεὸν θεοῦ Διόνυσον κατάγουσαι”

⁵⁰ Eurip Bacch 50-250; Livy 39.9-14; Beard, et al (1996) 89-95

Section IV. Reactions to Socio-political Change

The Roman attitude towards religious and social activity was being transformed by the extensive reach of this fledgling empire, permeating through all aspects of daily life. Literature provides us a medium for observing how systematic changes in the state were perceived and whether those changes were tolerated by the citizen class. Literature is a symbolic form of capitalism which can be access-restricted by the aristocracy in order to increase its prestige or it can be used to isolate a discourse from the larger discussion within society.⁵¹ Livy provides substantial insight into how undercurrents of social unrest promoted a small-scale reaction in artistic media:

Et cum vis morbi nec humanis consiliis nec ope diuina levaretur, victis
superstitione animis ludi quoque scenici, nova res bellicoso populo—nam circi
modo spectaculum fuerat—inter alia caelestis irae placamina instituti dicuntur;
ceterum parva quoque, ut ferme principia omnia, et ea ipsa peregrina res fuit.

When the force of the pestilence was alleviated neither by human strategies nor by divine help, they were overwhelmed by superstitious fears and are said to have also instituted theatrical shows (*ludi scenici*), a new phenomenon for a warlike people (for their only spectacle was the circus), among other efforts to appease the

⁵¹ Habinek (1998) 32-33, 62

wrath of the gods. But this was a small thing, as almost all things are initially, and it was imported from abroad.⁵²

He continues on to explain how a few simple lute players went on to adopt the clothing and dances of the Etruscans, eventually incorporating Atellan Farce and Oscan games, an out of control spiral that illustrates how a small beginning can reach a level of madness unintentionally.

Livy's passage is particularly relevant when analyzing the literature of the Middle Republic and Plautus in particular. Small adaptations influenced by the ever expanding cultural diversity of Rome would be incorporated incrementally, continually making his comedies more complex. At some point, the synthesis is so far-reaching that it can no longer be considered translation or adaptation, but an independent style of literature of a well-versed composer. When Plautus adapts the plot of Greek comedies and tragedies to his own benefit it is usually evident in the prologue of the play. Based on surviving literature, there is little evidence to suggest that Plautus adopted Greek originals close enough to deem it a "translation." Each play shows characteristics of influence from all around Italy, using selected Greek themes in order to build upon them or subvert them. Around 200 BCE, Rome's decision to look towards the Eastern kingdoms and take decisive offensive strategy to assert power spurred a hyper-nationalism that was vital for her success.

⁵² Livy 7.2.3-6

This transition had the most profound impact on the development of an explicit expression of what it meant to be Roman and the *Amphitruo* seems to be a direct result of this new ideal as an independent work of literature. Past attempts to illuminate or reconstruct some “tragic prototype that is lost to us” in order to understand this play have ultimately failed, not from our lack of ability to nail down the erudite interpolations of exterior influence but of an inability to recognize that this is the first true expression of Romanism extant in Latin literature.⁵³ The uncomfortable reaction to Plautus’ exceptional and non-conformative play is the result of this fledgling culture establishing the rules of being for the rest of the world to see. The question “what is weird about the *Amphitruo*?” has inevitably become more nuanced, developing into “what unique qualities are the Romans asserting about themselves in this new way?”

It has been clear for quite some time that among the myriad of influences forming the plot of the *Amphitruo* that there was an undercurrent of Euripidean tragedy, namely through his *Bacchae* and his lost play *Amphytrion*.⁵⁴ This tragic intrusion into such a lively form of comedy has often been seen as a failed attempt at a hybrid play, not at all helped by the fact that Mercury implies such an attempt in the prologue of the play:

⁵³ Stewart (1958) 348-49

⁵⁴ Stewart (1958) 348-373

Nunc quam rem oratum huc veni primum proloquar,

post argumentum huius eloquar tragoediae.

quid? contraxistis frontem, quia tragoediam

dixi futuram hanc? deus sum, commutavero.

eandem hanc, si voltis, faciam ex tragoedia

comoedia ut sit omnibus isdem versibus.

utrum sit an non voltis? sed ego stultior,

quasi nesciam vos velle, qui divos siem.

teneo quid animi vestri super hac re siet:

faciam ut commixta sit: sit **tragicomoedia**.

nam me perpetuo facere ut sit comoedia,

reges quo veniant et di, non par arbitror.

quid igitur? quoniam hic servos quoque partes habet,

faciam sit, proinde ut dixi, **tragicomoedia**.

Now first, I'll tell you what I've come here to ask you

then I'll tell you the theme of the tragedy.

What? You're frowning, because I said that

this will be a tragedy? I am a god! I can change it!

If you'd like, I will make a comedy from this

tragedy with all the same verses.

Is that what you want, or not? But I'm an idiot,
as if I didn't know you want it, seeing that I'm a god.
I understand what your feelings are in the matter:
I'll make it a mixed one! It'll be a **tragicomedy**!
But I don't suppose it shouldn't entirely be a comedy
one in which kings and gods might come.
What then? Since it has slave parts
I'll make it a **tragicomedy**, just as I said earlier!⁵⁵

The adoption of a hybrid genre as a framework for a play taking the pervasive motif of doubling to an absurd degree should make sense even when the *Amphitruo* is taken out of its historical context.⁵⁶ However, by exploring the play as an expression of the new Roman culture it becomes evident that it perfectly expresses a diverse nation that absorbed aspects of the many cultures she consumed. While it is worthwhile to do a close reading of the play in order to expose the intertextual references in order to explain the inclusion or exclusion of certain linguistic features influencing the play, that is not my

⁵⁵ Plaut. Amph. 50-59

⁵⁶ Christenson (2000) 14-16

purpose in this endeavor.⁵⁷ For full disclosure, my interpretation will be based on two assumptions: that the *Amphitruo* is an original composition of Plautus (not a direct adaptation) and that the duplication of characters and themes is a direct result of the moralizing and instructional nature of the comedy. Rather than exploring the complex poetic dialogue between the scenes and characters (since Christenson has already thoroughly commented on the nature and interaction of these dualities) I would like to investigate the metaphorical function of the *Amphitruo* as a sort of “handbook to Romanness” that was contemporaneously being contrived and renewed during this rapid phase of cultural development.

By the production of the *Amphitruo* in 194, Rome had already invaded their cultural progenitor and was situating herself to move into Anatolia. The political institutions that sought to unite Rome in the third century by incorporating (or at least tolerating) inadvertently created a situation in which the rise of independently funded and maintained cults transferred obedience to an unauthorized entity and developed value-systems that were in deep conflict with the established social and family structure of Rome.⁵⁸ Laws restricting the participation in foreign cults became necessary and concerns regarding elite manipulation of religious festivals in order to gain political

⁵⁷ Feeney (2016) 42-48. Here, Feeney notes that Roman translation and interpretation of Greek originals is an artistic work, in that choosing what not to translate is just as revealing as choosing what to translate; the act of translation itself is ultimately a series of artistic choices on the part of the author — for example, deciding to translate colloquialisms true to their linguistic features or semantic meanings.

⁵⁸ Beard, et al (1998) Chapter 2-3

advantage on the *cursus honorum* were already evident.⁵⁹ In the *Amphitruo*, Plautus seems to be tackling these concerns directly by playing out a protracted conflict between Roman *virtus* and the more liberal and humanistic values emerging through the transmission of culture.⁶⁰

One of the unique features of Plautine comedy is the interaction between the actors and spectators. Characters on stage often make direct appeals to the audience, which has variously been interpreted as a hangover from farcical improvisation or desperation on the part of the playwright to grab the attention of an audience with limited intellect and attention span.⁶¹ True to form, just before Mercury's controversial assertion that the *Amphitruo* was to be a 'tragicomedy' he captures the attention of the audience by direct address: "Hey now! All of you pay attention to what I'm saying! *nunc iam huc animum omnes quae loquar aduertite!*"⁶² Though this could indicate a less than attentive audience, its occurrence so early in the play suggests that he is directing particular attention to the lines that follow, "*You must wish for what we wish for, since my father and I lay claim to your gratitude and that of the state; debetis uelle quae velimus: meruimus et ego et pater de uobis et re publica,*"⁶³ These two lines challenge the

⁵⁹ Beard, et al (1998) Chapter 2

⁶⁰ Sutton (1993) 65-66

⁶¹ Adams (2004) 116-130

⁶² Plaut Amph 40

⁶³ Plaut Amhp 41-42

audience to both discern what exactly it is that the characters wish for and to then act upon it as recompense for the favor established by the gods. In a clever parody full of legal jargon relating the law codes against corrupt practices (by order of Jupiter⁶⁴), Not only is he making light of contemporary political anxieties, he directly addresses the aediles who are perpetuating this unfair behavior, ironically, as they are seated in the audience separate from the non-elite for the first time. This was a symbolic demonstration emphasizing the increasing power disparity between elite and non-elite citizens, which was only made possible by the constant influx of wealth brought about by the state-sponsored warfare. Mercury directly confronts the political corruption taking place thorough the financiers of sponsored festivals by calling out that it is only by virtue (*virtute*) and not by bribery or dishonesty (*non ambitione nec perfidia*) that a man can win at life (*uos uictores uiuere*).⁶⁵ The plight of the non-elite is acknowledged from the onset of the play, even before Mercury identifies himself:

ut uos in uostris uoltis mercimoniis
emundis uendundisque me laetum lucris
afficere atque adiuuare in rebus omnibus,
et ut res rationesque uostrorum omnium,
bene expedire uoltis peregrique et domi,

⁶⁴ Plaut Amph 64; a reiteration of the initial appeal following a short digression about the “tragicomedy” *nunc hoc me orare auobis iussit Iuppiter*

⁶⁵ Plaut Amph 75-78

bonoque atque amplo auctare perpetuo lucro
quasque incepistis res quasque inceptabitis,
et uti bonis uos uostrosque omnis nuntiis
me afficere uoltis, ea afferam, ea ut nuntiem
quae maxume in rem uostram communem sient
(nam uos quidem id iam scitis concessum et datum
mi esse ab dis aliis, nuntiis praesim et lucro):
haec ut me uoltis approbare, annitier
lucrum ut perenne uobis semper suppetat,
ita huic facietis fabulae silentium
itaque aequi et iusti hic eritis omnes arbitri.

As you wish me to give you a rich gain in the buying
and selling of goods and to support you in everything,
and as you wish me to advance the business matters and
speculations of all of you abroad and at home and to
prosper with good and large profit for ever what you
have begun and what you will begin; and as you wish me
to bring you and all your family members good news
and to bring and announce what's most profitable for
your common good

(for you already know that I was put in charge of
messages and profit by the other gods);
as you want me to bless you in these matters and to try
my best so that you always have constant profit,
you will keep silence during this play and
you will all be fair and just judges.⁶⁶

In making a direct appeal to those who are most affected by (and conspicuously separate from) the unprecedented new wealthy class, Mercury provides them an opportunity to admonish those acting unjustly (if only under the auspices of the theater). One of the social changes that provided the framework upon which Plautus was able to transform his plays from a performance into dialogue was the establishment of the *collegium poetarum* in 207. The new rising classes of poets had a disruptive effect on established hierarchies, allowing them to accrue their own peculiar status and an unprecedented amount of power.⁶⁷ For the first time poets and playwrights were clashing with members of the nobility as the new entrepreneurial middle-man of literature.⁶⁸ The elites reaction to this is equally apparent in *Amphitruo*, as they establish restrictive laws concerning the

⁶⁶ Plaut. Amph 1-15

⁶⁷ Feeney (2016) 189-90

⁶⁸ Feeney (2016) 190

consumption of theatrical games and cults, culminating in the eventual ban of the cult of Dionysus in 186.⁶⁹

While it is true that Plautus makes no direct references to people or situations, there are situations in which he is clearly being referential. For modern readers, these references can be elusive since social commentary is topical and transient and contemporary works of literature are so scarce. While many of the extant plays in the Plautine corpus are mildly moralizing, primarily focusing on topics of domestic *pietas* such as paternalism (filial piety), female modesty, and maintaining proper social roles, his later plays become decisively reflective of his improved social standing and contact with the aristocracy. However it is in the *Amphitruo* where the transition from comedic playwright to social commentator seems most apparent:

uirtute dixit uos uictores uiuere,
non ambitione nec perfidia: qui minus
eadem histrioni sit lex quae summo uiro?
uirtute ambire oportet, non fauitoribus.
sat habet fauitorum semper qui recte facit,
si illis fides est quibus est ea res in manu.

⁶⁹ Beard (1996) 92ff

He said that you can live as winners on account
of your capability, not of canvassing or unfair behavior.
Why shouldn't the same law apply to an actor as to a
man of high rank? One ought to canvass through one's
capability, not through some flatterers. A man who always
acts correctly has enough supporters, if those can be
trusted in whose hands this is.⁷⁰

Still in the prologue (and therefore still in the context of appealing to the audience), it is evident that Plautus is making an appeal to the Roman morality with its duplicate pairing of *virtus* beginning and then reinforcing this appeal. Livy describes what amounts to a political and religious overhaul, creating a new college of priests to oversee festivals and games in order to ensure funds were not 'mishandled' for personal gain.⁷¹ Beginning in the mid-second century, various laws were passed regarding private temple dedications and *ludi* financing that created avenues for established elites to make their way through political ranks well before the appropriate age or experience.⁷² One

⁷⁰ Plaut Amph 75-80

⁷¹ Livy 32.42-49

⁷² Beard, et al. (1996) 100-106; A profitable career could be built at this period by using conspicuous expenditure on the games as one of the first rungs (the aedileship) of the political ladder: this lavish display was supposed to ensure rapid election to the higher ranks (praetorship and consulship), at which serious warfare and serious profits would follow. In the years preceding this bill, the plebeian aediles in particular had been very successful in being elected to the praetorship during the year of their aedileship, in fact within a short period of their holding these games

well attested family group who took advantage of these beneficial expeditures loopholes was that of the Scipios. Incredibly successful in becoming the who's who of the Roman elite, both P. Scipio Africanus and P. Scipio Nasica earned praise for their successes. However skilled in battle however, P. Africanus was notoriously famous for visiting the temple of Jupiter so often that even the dogs ignored him, not to mention his unrelenting claims to be the successor of Alexander the Great, even suggesting that his mother was impregnated by a snake!⁷³ Although this had little effect on his ability to successfully hold office, his wild claims of Herculean heritage might have earned him a nod in *Amphitruo*. It would be futile to enumerate every reference to Hercules in a play concerning his birth there are an instance where Plautus is making more a more direct reference, and possibly for the first time. In a heated conversation between Jupiter and Mercury (as Amphitryon and Sosia) at line 520, Jupiter threatens him by shouting, "*quod ego iam hoc scipione*—" (I'll take out my staff right now an—), however before he can finish the word Alcmena interrupts, cutting him off. While this is a comment that would have happened quickly and potentially been overlooked, for those who were in the elite circles would have found significant humor in Jupiter taking up his dedicated admirer to threaten people in the theater.

With this political aspect in mind, it is time to consider one of the more controversial aspects of the *Amphitruo*: Jupiter as actor. Early interpretations often denied that the *Amphitruo* would have been well received by a Roman audience in large part due

⁷³ Beard, et al. (1996) 84ff

to what was deemed a blatant irreverence of the gods by having them as participants on stage. Considerable progress has been made to make light on Plautus' unique decision to create a divine actor and it is generally accepted that if the human actor would have been completely transparent to the audience (the actor, playing a god playing an actor), therefore creating no conflict with *pietas*. Primarily however, Jupiter's character appears to function as a sounding board for Plautus himself, and it is thought that he would have been the actor on stage who played Jupiter/Amphitryon.⁷⁴ There may be some truth to this statement if we can take a little liberty with the unusual closing line of the play, in which Amphitryon encourages the spectators to give a round of applause to Jupiter (*nunc, spectatores, Jouis summi causa clare plaudite*⁷⁵). One can imagine Jupiter pulling off his mask to reveal that he was not only Amphitryon but Plautus as well, however this is highly speculative. The actions taken by the *tresviri*⁷⁶ (155) suggest that Plautus is referring to the *tresviri capitales*, who were notoriously responsible for maintaining order in the city by whatever means necessary. Considering the ever present duality within the *Amphitruo* however, it is possible that Plautus is simultaneously making an allusion to the *triumviri epulones*, who were appointed to oversee the rituals and games and act as a check on the magistrates who were using them for political advantages in 196 BCE. If so, this would be one of the most direct references to laws regarding the political changes

⁷⁴ Christenson (2000) 20-24

⁷⁵ Plaut Amph 1146

⁷⁶ Plautus did not specify a type of *tresviri*, a vagueness allowing an alternative interpretation and an opportunity to present another dualistic reference

taking place at the end of the second century. Still in the prologue, Mercury reveals another surprise to his audience:

miriari nolim uos quapropter Iuppiter
nunc histriones curet; ne miremini:
ipse hanc acturust Iuppiter comoediam.
quid? ammirati estis? quasi uero nouom
nunc proferatur Iouem facere histrioniam;
etiam, histriones anno quom in proscaenio hic
Iouem inuocarunt, uenit, ausilio is fuit.
praeterea certo prodit in tragoedia.
hanc fabulam, inquam, hic Iuppiter hodie ipse aget
et ego una cum illo. nunc <uos> animum aduortite,
dum huius argumentum eloquar comoediae.

I wouldn't want you to be surprised that
Jupiter cares about actors now
Don't be surprised: Jupiter himself is going
to act a part in this comedy. What?
You are surprised? As if something new were brought on now,
Jupiter taking up the dramatic art. Last year, when the

actors called upon Jupiter here on stage, he also came
and brought them help. What's more, he certainly
appears in tragedy. This play, then, Jupiter will act himself
here today, and I together with him.
Now pay attention while I'm telling you the plot of this comedy!

This oft-quoted scene generally appears among discussions of the dating of the *Amphitruo*. A direct reference to Jupiter performing on stage is interpreted as evidence for a live performance of tragedy in Rome, at which Plautus would have been inspired to use it as a basis for the plot of this play.⁷⁷ This explanation makes sense within the historical and literary context and further removes the complication Plautus' access to the Greek literature upon which he was basing many of his performances. Keeping in mind the obsessive duality of the play, it is very likely that there is also a subtle political undercurrent associated with this bold pronouncement. The revelation of Jupiter as an actor would have certainly caused a stir among the audience, which would have perhaps been in some part related to Jupiter's connection to the *epulones* who would have been conspicuous in overseeing the production of the games. Mercury seems to be foreshadowing this connection in his parody of the law codes, explaining that Jupiter has ordered that inspectors (*conquistores*) are to be appointed to canvass the audience (especially the aediles, who Mercury says should not be immune to the law) as well as

⁷⁷ Stewart (1958) 348 - 373

the actors in order to prevent bribery.⁷⁸ The connection in this case is not all that unexpected since the *epulones* acted under the auspices of Jupiter. If we nuance the reading of this section, it can be divided into two parts: Jupiter as the overseer of the *epulones* (64-92) along with Jupiter the tragic character previously taking the stage in Rome (93-95). By associating the first portion with Jupiter *epulones*, he did not arrive to help the actors in the performance of a play but rather began to give them aid in preventing exploitation of the games upon creation of the new office; the second portion then would maintain the tradition of indicating a stage performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* which Plautus had the opportunity to attend.⁷⁹ While it is natural to associate this performance with Greek tragedy and was certainly a framework for the characters it may not have been the only tragic influence on Plautus for this comedy, Roman tragedy was readily available at this time could potentially offer a Roman counterpart.

Although our evidence is scant, it is not completely lacking. A dramatic performance in 204 BCE celebrated the adoption of the Anatolian cult of the Magna Mater from Pergamon. The adoption of the cult was a desperate response of Rome to a perfect storm of drought, meteor showers, religious fervor, and anxiety surrounding the final years of the Second Punic War.⁸⁰ Games were celebrated upon the arrival of the cult stone but it would be ten years before her temple was completed and dedicated on the

⁷⁸ Plaut *Amph* 64-85

⁷⁹ Stewart (1958) 348-49

⁸⁰ Roller (1999) 263ff.

Palatine Hill (the advent of this cult has profound implications for the understanding of the *Amphitruo*, and will be discussed at length in the following section). The games of 204 are particularly relevant since it is at this celebration which Naevius performed the tragedy *Lucurgus*.⁸¹ Evidence of this play is fragmentary, but the plot is clearly adapted from the Greek myth concerning the Thracian King Lycurgus, in which he travelled from Asia into Europe, captured then killed worshipping Bacchantes, and was punished horrifically for it by their patron god Bacchus (Liber in Roman mythology).⁸² According to Boyle, the *fabula praetexta* were an invention of Naevius, and heavily influenced Plautus' writing, so it is not unrealistic to expect that he would have both attended the play and incorporated relevant concepts into his own works (Mercury refers to the play as a *fabula* in line 94).⁸³ Because *Lucurgus* was a direct commentary on fears concerning tyrannical abuse of power, and ongoing war with Carthage, it is a particularly apt parallel to the concerns expressed in the *Amphitruo*.⁸⁴ The pervading theme between these two performances is the destruction of familial and religious *virtus* caused by the onset of drunkenness, madness, and insanity — all features of the wildly popular cult of Bacchus/

⁸¹ Boyle (2006) 47-48

⁸² Boyle (2006) 42

⁸³ Boyle (2006) 47-50; The *fabula praetexta* were the most innovative change in drama instituted by Naevius. This genre incorporated both mythological (*antiqua*) and contemporary history, which is one of the unique features of Plautine comedy, particularly in respect to the *Amphitruo* as the only early comedy to have a mythological foundation.

⁸⁴ By 202 BCE, the custom of appointing a dictator in times of war ceased and the Second Punic War had ended.

Dionysus imported to Rome in the fifth century and a point of contention between the state and citizens at the end of the second century.

Section V. Conclusions

The Romans of the Middle Republic exploded into the second century BCE⁸⁵ scene with unprecedented wealth and power following the end of the Second Punic War. In direct response to the rapid changes of their adolescent empire, the new ultra-elite aristocracy made very conscious decisions regarding statehood and economy that had an unexpected ripple effect for what would become Latin literature. Feeney rightly states that the development of Latin literature following a Greek model was not a required outcome of intimate culture contact between the Greeks and Italians.⁸⁶

Early Latin literature is notoriously difficult to unravel, if for no other reason than the sheer lack of exempla that remain from its beginnings in 240 with the Saturnian translation of Homer's *Odyssey* by Livius Andronicus, and continuing on to the more well attested plays of Plautus and Terence at the beginning and middle of the second century, respectively. With so many of the early Italian authors directly relating their literature to that of Greece either in title or in theme, it is easy to be inclined to interpret Latin artistic culture as an unusual, but natural consequence of continual contact with their Greek neighbors. Even with what seems to be blatant transmission via direct translation, Feeney's recent evaluation of this early phase as the great "Latin translation project" centers around a more nuanced approach of interpretation.⁸⁷ His evaluation

⁸⁵ Following this, any date given will be assumed to be BCE unless otherwise stated.

⁸⁶ Feeney (2016) Chapter 2

⁸⁷ Feeney (2016) 190

includes an historical, cultural, and linguistic overlap that more fully exposes the adoption of literature as an asset acquisition rather than ornament.

Through the attestations later works by Cato and Cicero, we are aware of Roman observation of Classical and Hellenistic Greek literature in performance and through the translation of Greek works. Habinek sets a framework within which we can better understand the transmission and ultimate adoption of Greek literature as an economic process, specifically with literature as a symbolic form of capitalism. He notes that “physical access to the texts of Greek literature was restricted to a small sector of society, and not every text would have been available to every interested member of the aristocracy.”⁸⁸ Viewing literature within the context of the historical period from 264 to 149 and through this particular lens of power and capitalism can help to resolve some of the fundamental problems of interpretation surrounding the rapidly developed style of independent Latin literature in the earliest phases. The wars of the transition period from the third to second centuries radically changed the Roman concept of “Romanness.” Rapid acquisition of land, power, and wealth in a government unequipped to deal with such changes allowed for sumptuary laws restricting flamboyance, which itself was a direct result of a new multicultural Rome. Occasionally the laws benefited groups that were typically ostracized, and it is the fortuitous combination of the institution of *collegium poetarum* providing an avenue for class upheaval, increased wealth and privatization of cults and wealth, increased demand for *luxuria* and the introduction of the

⁸⁸ Habinek (1998) 62

wild-gamed contests of the *Megalensia* that even presented the opportunity for the production of *Amphitruo*. By the late 190's, Rome had finally developed a sense of unified identity and renewed control of regulations. It is during this time that comedies in the form of highly farcical social comedies, which is likely the result of a more unified culture. It is through great political, social, and religious turmoil that Plautus found his footing, without this tumultuous period of multiculturalism and hyper-nationalism, Latin literature would be quite different.

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